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ABSTRACT

Establishing and supporting a theoretical view in favor of assessment and evaluation as an adjunct to psychotherapy is clearly a difficult task in view of current anti-testing biases. But translating that viewpoint into practical terms within the environment of an emerging university can prove to be every bit as difficult. The current paper treats the rationale and techniques used to plan and implement a conceptual framework for human assessment in a systematic and effective manner at Sangamon State University. The approach used is innovative in that it cuts across programmatic boundaries to meet student needs while satisfying administrative requirements for cost efficiency. (Author)

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ROLE OF DIAGNOSTICS IN MODERN CLINICAL AND COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAMS

EVOLUTION OF THE CURRENT EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT SEQUENCE AT SANGAMON STATE UNIVERSITY

By

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Abstract

Establishing and supporting a theoretical view in favor of assessment and evaluation as an adjunct to psychotherapy clearly has proven to be a difficult task. But translating that viewpoint into practical terms within the environment of an emerging university has proven every bit as difficult. The current paper deals with the rationale and techniques used to plan and implement the conceptual framework outlined by my colleagues in a systematic and efficient manner.

EVOLUTION OF THE CURRENT EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT SEQUENCE AT SANGAMON STATE UNIVERSITY

In contrast to the style utilized by my colleagues, I have chosen to utilize the case study approach, applied here to an entire course sequence. No real attempt is made to tie our experiences into the literature for two reasons: first, because the omission of references promotes readability; and second, because little has been written regarding the nitty-gritty of implementation.

Practically every institution of higher learning has had to deal with problems involving the instruction of evaluation and assessment oriented courses and sequences. However, the very fact of Sangamon State University's newness, its unusual character and the broad based configurations of its social science curricula combined to confront us with a series of problems that may presage the future. In short, it could very well be that the same problems Sangamon State University has faced are just waiting over the horizon for every institution offering instruction in evaluation, testing, or measurement.

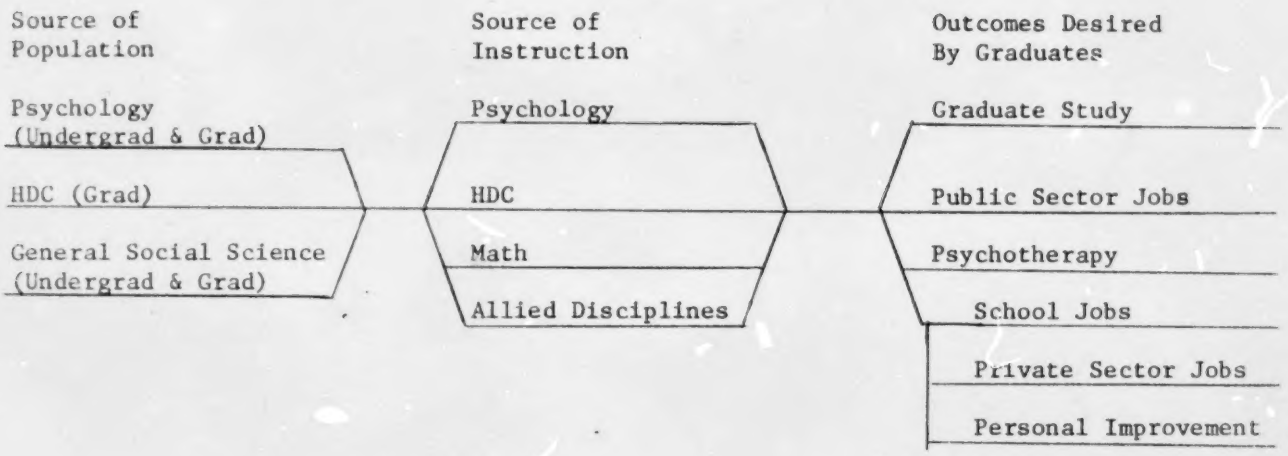
A major problem confronting us at the inception of the University was whether to require courses such as Test and Measurements in our various social science programs at all. The bias against testing is strong and influential elements within the student body, faculty and administration at SSU often championed a no-testing posture. Rather than assault this position on a purely theoretical basis, the "pro-testing faction" agreed initially to make Test and Measurements an elective in the HDC and Psychology. As expected, reality in the form of job and advanced training demands shocked some of our early graduates so badly that the "anti-testing faction" surrendered the fortress without a prolonged struggle. They resented their loss and still do, but reality makes a strong opponent.

Having received our half-hearted mandate, it them became necessary to develop an assessment sequence which would serve our students adequately. Some of the problems we faced which prevented a traditional approach included the following:

1. Student population widely divergent in ability, education, experience, and career goals.
2. Limited instructional resources, requiring that classes be broad-based enough to encompass students from several programs and instructional levels.
3. Instructional needs so diverse that faculty would have to be drawn from a wide variety of sources, including the private sector.
4. The necessity of keeping overall class enrollments at acceptable University levels, i.e., 18 students per class on the average.

In view of these major constraints it became obvious early in the game that no one program could provide the needed resources nor could the traditional approaches to solving the problem utilized by established institutions be employed. The only rational solution appeared to be the development of a carefully monitored instructional systems approaches. To initiate this process, informal meetings were held in the summer of 1973 between faculty members and administrators from the affected programs to determine the parameters of the system which would have to be developed. An ad hoc committee cutting across program boundaries was also established at that time to monitor the system's progress. This committee with a somewhat changed composition continues to meet to this date. At the time of the original meeting the situation faced by SSU

would have been depicted in this manner:



If anything, the diversity pictured in the chart above is understated, so certain parameters become obvious at the outset. Granted unlimited resources, a possible solution might have been to have each program provide highly specific instruction for its own students. But even this might not have proved feasible because of the diversity of student interests found within each program. Each program had within its ranks discrete groups of students ranging in size from three or four each to fifty or more with differing personal and career goals. HDC for example had students interested in pursuing a Ph.D., others who were full-time teachers planning to remain in their classrooms, and others entering careers in psychotherapy, to provide only a partial list of its special interests. Fortunately, analysis showed that student interests often cut across levels of instruction and program areas; this made it possible to develop courses with potentially large student bases.

For example, students in both HDC (a graduate program) and Psychology (graduate and undergraduate) often were intent on eventually becoming psychotherapists. Additional students in several programs such as HDC, psychology,

sociology, and administration were interested in careers at public agencies. These special interest groups thus formed an integrating principle for decisions on final course offerings.

As an initial step the ad hoc committee designated one of its members as interim coordinator of day-to-day activities in the evaluation and assessment field for social sciences. This less than desirable honor which has since passed to a worthy successor entailed a number of nasty tasks such as setting up a test materials center and establishing waiting lists for high demand classes. This step relieved many persistent daily hassles and provided a breathing space to all involved.

Proceeding from this point, the committee then decided to find the answers to three very pragmatic questions:

1. What courses are needed to satisfy students needs?
2. How often should specific courses be offered?
3. Who should teach these classes and how should they be taught?

WHAT COURSES ARE NEEDED?

This questions was answered primarily through a study of programmatic requirements and student career choices.

A study of programmatic requirements indicated that in more than one instance minor revisions in the format of a course taught by one program would cause it to fully satisfy the requirements of a second or third program. A case in point was the basic psychological tests and measurements course. By broadening its scope and emphasizing practical applications of test and measurement instruments and techniques, a revised format was arrived at which satisfied the requirements of several programs. This meant that students from more than one program could take the same basic

course and receive programmatic credit for it via crosslisting.

Through this step, a tremendous amount of duplicated effort was eliminated while at the same time confusion resulting from a multiplicity of course offerings was reduced. An additional benefit lay in the fact that not every program had to recruit its own evaluation faculty. This was especially critical at a time when the University was forced to hold the line on faculty recruiting.

While perhaps a majority of student needs were satisfied by courses of a general nature such as this, a survey of students needs showed that certain needs were of a more specific nature. For example, teachers indicated a need for an evaluation course designed to aid them on the job, while individuals planning further graduate study cited a need for courses in testing theory or instrument development. Such courses were reasonably easy to justify, because the demand was sufficiently high and the course of such a nature that relatively high class enrollments could be maintained.

This was not the case with highly specialized classes as individual testing courses in intelligence, personality, or organic disorders. The demand for these courses was high due to student career needs but to meet accepted standards, enrollment had to be kept to six to eight students per section. This in turn meant decreased average class sizes and problems in satisfying administrators and governing boards. The question of how this was handled will be dealt with below, but suffice it to say at this point that the problems generated in meeting such highly specific student needs proved extremely serious.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD SPECIFIC COURSES BE OFFERED?

Having determined what courses were needed, the committee settled on

a varied approach to the question of how often to offer certain courses. Where specific courses were essential to the satisfactory completion of programmatic requirements, the determination of how many course sections of that course to offer per term was relatively simple. The number of persons in each program was obtainable from Institutional Research files and a simple student flow model enabled us to project course demand with some accuracy. Courses fitting this category were labeled high demand courses and two to three sections were offered per term.

The demand for courses designed to serve large subgroups within the programs such as teachers or prospective experimentalists proved somewhat more difficult to estimate by logical means, but highly amenable to solution by trial and error. That is to say we offered "X" number of classes in an area such as classroom evaluation per year. If overenrolled, we offered additional sections. If underenrolled, we cut back. By the end of the second year, we were able to estimate fairly accurately the need for classes in this category.

In some cases, especially where the demand for a specific class was low or instruction in an area demanded expertise or equipment unavailable to the University, students were referred to other institutions. Our stance was not that such students did not have legitimate needs; rather it was that their needs could be better met by pre-existing institutions.

Finally, the question of how to handle high demand, low class size courses such as individual testing had to be dealt with. Here it was decided that financial exigencies demanded that a set number of such classes be taught per semester and that a waiting list of qualified candidates should be developed and maintained. The wisdom of this approach became evident, despite the howls of frustrated students.

WHO SHOULD TEACH THE CLASSES AND HOW SHOULD THEY BE TAUGHT?

As the types of classes needed and the number of sections desired per semester or year became clarified, persons within the various program possessing primary or secondary interests and aptitudes in the needed areas were determined. The vast majority of faculty in all programs willingly contributed to the joint effort. Where skills needed were not available within the University, part-time faculty were recruited. This proved particularly useful in several ways. It enabled us to obtain expertise we could not normally afford to hire on a full-time basis, whil providing an invaluable touchstone to the practical world in which our graduates eventually had to work. Also, it provided us with a valuable entre to potential practicum and internship placements.

Through the employment of faculty from several programs and the use of part-time faculty, the course needs of most students were met promptly and expeditiously. At this stage of our development the course descriptions and formats were fairly well standardized but due to the multiplicity of programs and instructors involved, an unevenness in instruction sometimes developed. In essence we were relying upon the standardization of course format to provide us with uniformity in instruction.

So at stage two of the evaluation program's development, the system looked something like this:

Source of Student Population:	Source of Instruction	Types of Curriculum Offerings:
Special Interest Areas Within All Programs	All Affected Programs Plus Part-time Faculty	1. General High Demand Courses
		2. Moderate Demand Courses
		3. Speciality Courses
		4. Low-Demand Courses (Other Institutions)

This configuration, whatever its fault, worked reasonably well for a period of approximately two years. The improvement over the old laissez faire system was significant but carefully monitored feedback from students, faculty, administrators, and potential employers obtained by means of surveys and studies led us to discover several inadequacies. Chief among the complaints were the following:

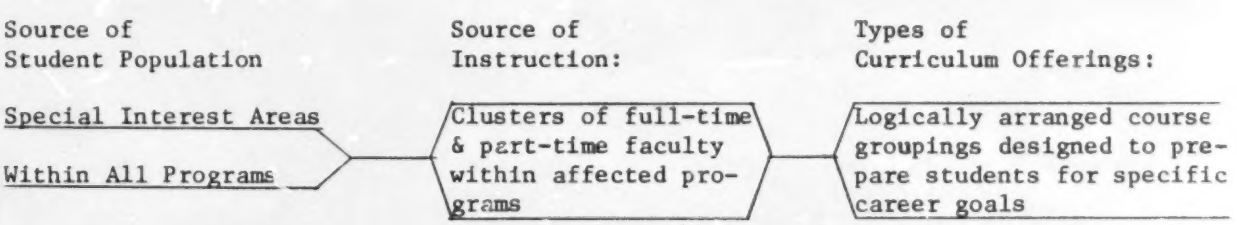
1. Unevenness in instruction.
2. Lack of continuity in certain sequences of courses and undue overlap between courses.
3. A poor fit between abilities of graduates and job requirements.
4. A variety of administrative problems related to evaluation classes.
5. Failure to meet accreditation requirements on the part of certain courses.

The basic problem upon analysis appeared to be a lack of coordination in the instruction and sequencing of course offerings to meet actual student needs. While using the special interest areas and course formats as integrating principles has helped overcome several problems, it had resulting in a molecular class structure, in which each course stood alone and was not necessarily integrated with related offerings. While this might have been a partially acceptable situation if the content of each class were completely standardized such forced standardization was not a practical or desirable outcome.

The ultimate solution appeared to be the development of carefully structured course sequences designed to accomodate students from a variety of special interest areas and leading to highly specific outcomes. Putting this concept into practice required first that rudimentary flow charts be

developed outlining the paths to be taken by individuals with varying career goals as they progressed through the evaluation sequence. Using the data gained from this process, steps then had to be taken to insure a smooth interface between each of the courses contained within a course sequence.

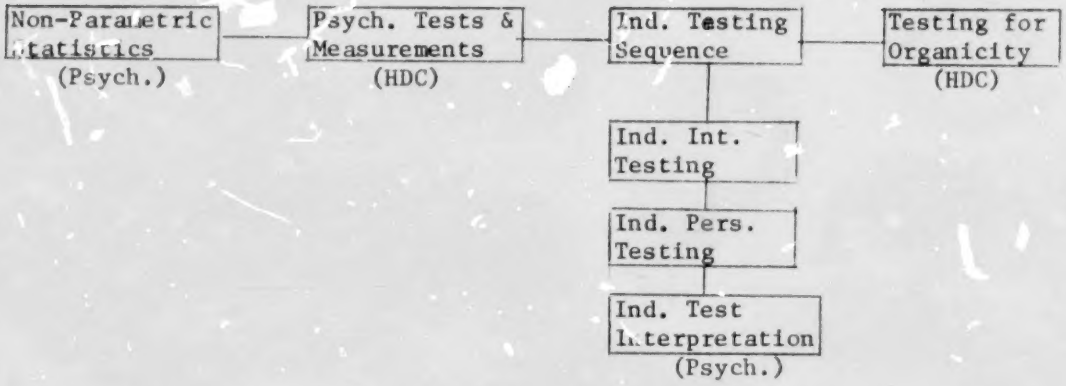
Basically this involved 2 processes: First, each course had to be analyzed and revised where necessary to insure that no serious gaps or overlaps in course content occurred and to insure that each course phased logically into the next. Second, administrative measures had to be instituted to assure a smooth flow of students through particular course sequences. An example of such an administrative procedure was the development of an individual testing sequence in which no credit was granted until the entire sequence was completed. An additional procedure implemented was the assignment of specific course sequences to specific programs and clusters of instructors. Consequently the ultimate system developed began to evolve in the manner indicated below:


Source of Student Population
Source of Instruction:
Types of Curriculum Offerings:
Special Interest Areas
Within All Programs
Clusters of full-time & part-time faculty within affected programs
Logically arranged course groupings designed to prepare students for specific career goals

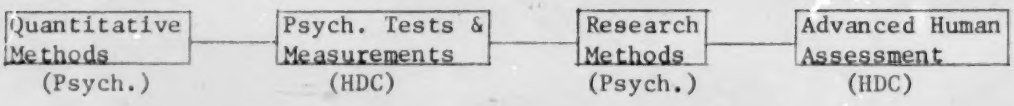
Reducing the concept to actual practice, let's trace the progress of two typical students with varying career goals as they progress thru the evaluation aspects of their training:

1. Student A - Intends to become a psychotherapist in a clinical setting.
2. Student B - Intends to become a school counselor.

Student A: Psychotherapist



Student B: School Counselor



Certainly, the systems developed have not proved foolproof. But judging from student and employer feedback, the end product has proven highly satisfactory. Such results could not have occurred with an unsystematic haphazard approach to the evaluation sequence.